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Equity Matters

University of Toronto

Status of Women Office / Office of the President

Interview with Paddy Stamp, Sexual Harassment Officer

Tracey Izatt: Could we start off by your telling me a little bit about yourself, what you've done in the past?

Paddy Stamp: The things that are most relevant to this position are that I worked as an affirmative action consultant with a civil liberties organization in the United Kingdom. An essential part of any equal opportunities program is a policy to deal with sexual harassment, whether it be in the workplace or an educational setting. I've been charged with the responsibility for assisting employers and educational institutions to draw up policies and programs of action to counter sexual harassment, including providing the necessary training to ease their introduction.

Obviously, you can't just impose a new policy on people without explaining why it's there, where it comes from, what it's intended to do, what it won't do. The educational function, I think, is almost one of the most important parts of a sexual harassment policy. The transformative value of a policy is that it changes people's attitudes — it gives them an understanding that they may not previously have had of what the issues are.

I have also had a kind of quasi-judicial role, responsible for the process of handling complaints. I have been responsible for counselling complainants and I think that this is important: I have also given advice to trade unions that are representing people against whom complaints have been made with respect to sexual harassment policy. So I have experienced the drawing up and the operation of policy from a number of different perspectives.

TI: What are the kinds of difficulties you encounter in bringing the policy in, making it active in a workplace?

PS: I think that people perceive that they are already rule bound. There's a lot of resistance to more penalties, more punitive measures. I think also that the questions that arise as soon as you start to discuss sexual harassment are of an order which men find threatening and discomforting and challenging, as indeed they should.

One response to that challenge, and I'm sure you'll be familiar with this, is to make fun of, to ridicule the very notion of sexual harassment and the very notion that one can counter it. People don't tend to do it quite so readily when we're talking about racial harassment; I think there is a more general understanding that racial harassment is as unacceptable as racism is unacceptable. The point I'd make about sexual harassment, and the reason the kind of defensive reaction to the mere raising of the issue quite often is to laugh at it is that unfortunately the form that sexual harassment frequently takes is seen as a parody if you like, an extreme version of what passes for normal acceptable sexual behaviour between men and women — where men initiate sexual negotiation and women play hard to get. It's therefore all too easy, I think, for people to respond to the issue by saying 'Oh, women love being sexually harassed' — and that's what it's all about.

TI: Do you think that the kinds of measures that the sexual harassment policies take on are regarded as very frightening? You said they are regarded as threatening, but it seems almost as though sometimes the backlash is extreme.

PS: It's very difficult to know whether it's a backlash or whether it's simply a question of making known what has not been known. I tend toward that view,

actually I think sexual harassment has been around for millennia, but we are now raising the issue.

TI: Do you think that progressive things like sexual harassment policies are having an effect?

PS: I do think that there has been a change in the attitudes that women have, for example, and not just women, by any means; there has also been a change in men's attitudes. Women are of course overwhelmingly the victims of sexual harassment, and men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators. I think that the new confidence that women have developed in the last dozen years will have a great deal to do with the success that we have thus far had in airing our issues and defining the agenda more effectively. I myself think that sexual harassment is part of a continuum of sexual coercion. It is about power, but it is not *not* about sex. Sexual harassment is an expression of a power relationship — it is an articulation of an effort to control, and it takes a form that is pertinent to sex or to gender, or to

PHOTO BY: GRAHAM RAWLINSON, *the newspaper*

sexual orientation. (The University of Toronto makes clear that sexual orientation is a part of sexual harassment, that one can be harassed on account of one's sex or one's sexual orientation.) It covers a whole range of behaviours starting from the kind of constant pejorative references to the sex or sexual orientation of an individual or group, ranging through seductive behaviour, if you like, for want of a better word, but the kind of unwelcome flirtation, through to coercive sexual behaviour — not just sexual suggestiveness, but unwelcome touching, and interference with the physical integrity of the victim — through to the threat of and the actual carrying out of the threat of sexual assault.

In my experience, one of the common factors when you ask a woman who is complaining of harassment, what it is that most concerns her, what she's feeling about what's happening — and I think this is an important question to ask — what it is that she fears, almost all the time she's going to talk about the underlying fear of escalation, that some kind of sexual coercion or sexual assault will be the end result if she doesn't do something now. This is why so often women will activate a procedure to combat sexual harassment: they fear that it's going to get worse. I think that it's important to acknowledge and appreciate that that fear is there. In the light of the figures on how many women can be expected to experience abuse at the hands of the men with whom they have their most intimate relationships — quite apart from strangers in the street — it's really hardly surprising that women carry that fear. It's something that men frequently haven't experienced and don't appreciate, and don't recognize. That's one of the reasons, again, I think that the process of education on sexual harassment has to involve a bringing together of women's experience and men's understanding.

TI: Do you find that some women are loath to consider the law as being something that can be utilized by them?

PS: Well, the truth is we're not talking about the law. At U of T we're talking about a policy which is, I hope, not legalistic in character because it's not appropriate that it should be. In its initial stages it's an attempt to resolve interpersonal conflict. Quite often the parties involved have very different perceptions of what's going on; what they really need is the opportunity to communicate their differences and arrive at some consensus. In its latter stages it is a disciplinary procedure; it's not a law.

But going back to the question, I think that there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that women are extremely reluctant to activate the processes of law. The reasons are obvious: the courts and the justice system traditionally have not represented the interests of women victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault; haven't appreciated the experience that women have of these issues. There's a great deal of evidence that's been gathered. Indeed in Toronto, the Metro Action Committee on Public Violence Against Women and Children has started keeping a data base of judicial comment in cases of sexual assault, which reflects a quite extraordinary lack of understanding of the experience of sexual assault, particularly when the assault or the harassment has been perpetrated by somebody who is in a position of trust.

TI: Is management reluctant to take on something like that?

PS: I think it really depends on their interest. One of the most persuasive factors for management is the staff time lost because sexual harassment has the result of making the workplace an unacceptable place for a lot of women to be. The impact on the victim of harassment often manifests itself physically, frequently quite seriously, and there is ample evidence that managers lose woman-hours if they permit sexual harassment to go unchecked. Managers are themselves frequently the target of sexual harassment; it is one of those things that can work in any direction.

TI: How do you differentiate between sexual harassment in the workplace and in a university?

PS: There are features of the life of a university community that are not present in, for example, a private company. Universities are employers: they do have staff, and the function of a sexual harassment policy would not have to be substantially different there to achieve the same effects. But one of the facets of sexual harassment in a university is that where there is already an existing power imbalance — other than the gender imbalance — like the archetypal situation where a member of the faculty is allegedly harassing a student — there is already a situation where the victim of harassment is in a position of dependence, either for grades or for references, on the alleged harasser.

TI: What do you think of the U of T policy?

PS: Its focus is on mediation, and informal resolution, and I do think that that's appropriate. It is important to distinguish that part of the policy from that dealing with disciplinary measures. It's crucial that if a woman wants to make a formal complaint she can do so with ease, that the policy doesn't prevent her, that there are not barriers to doing that in the very terms of the policy. I would not wish to spend my time working with a policy that I had essentially to dissuade people from using because it wasn't going to get them any redress, in terms of the formal disciplinary procedures; at the same time, I think that the emphasis within the policy on informal resolution and mediation as the first stages in resolving any dispute is crucial.

I perceive the policy as a statement of the University's position and of the standard of behaviour that it wishes to inculcate within the University populations. It's a statement of the University's commitment to equal opportunities and any policy that is more than simply a procedure for dealing with complaints has to embody such a statement, and the University's policy does that. I think that the challenges at the University of Toronto in particular are partly its size: 65,000 people from three different constituencies on three different campuses. I obviously cannot spread myself so thin as to provide one to one service to everyone on every campus, so my priority is going to be ensuring that I disseminate information and training materials about the policy and have good contacts with frontline people on all campuses, in all faculties, and in all constituencies.

TI: When you say that you have to disseminate information, how will you do this?

Status Quote

"As a father of two sons, I am outraged that such mind-twisting violence can knowingly and intentionally be implemented into OUR Universities."

(Excerpt from a letter sent to the President about women's studies.)

PS: Well, we have already leaflets directed at, variously, undergraduates and graduate students, faculty, and staff which give basic information about the policy, how it affects those groups, and what they can ask of the Sexual Harassment Officer. I will continue to distribute those as widely as possible, but also give some thought to how I can work with others in the University to promote the policy.

My job as Sexual Harassment Officer is to illuminate people who don't otherwise know about the policy as to what it is circumscribing and proscribing. As I have said, there is a grey area where the understanding of the harasser and the understanding of the victim as to what's actually gone on will be very different. What I think is important about the University's Policy is that it places the emphasis, not on the intentions of the person against whom harassment is alleged but on the impact of the behaviour on the person alleging harassment. Given that that's the emphasis of the policy it's really important that all possibilities for informal resolution, for informal mediation, are in place and are exhausted before the operation of the policy becomes a contest between two parties.

First mourn, then work for change

Geneviève Bergeron
Hélène Colgan
Nathalie Croteau
Barbara Daigneault
Anne-Marie Edward
Maud Haviernick
Barbara Maria Klueznick
Maryse Laganiere
Maryse Leclair
Anne-Marie Lemay
Sonia Pelletier
Michele Richard
Annie St. Arneault
Annie Turcotte

6 December, 1989

Editorial

Our academic year began with the Status of Women Office assuming responsibility on a temporary basis for the Sexual Harassment Education, Counselling and Complaint Office. This arrangement, while difficult but not unreasonable in the circumstances, obviously had a significant impact on the work of both offices. It is therefore a pleasure (bordering on ecstasy) to introduce Paddy Stamp as our Sexual Harassment Officer.

A number of important issues at various stages of development or review ensure a continuing high energy level in the second term. The reports of two Special Committees, one on the Policy and Procedures: Sexual Harassment (the "Wolf Committee") and one on the Policy and Procedures on Academic Appointments (the "Yip Committee") are before the University community for discussion and subsequent Governing Council approval. The Office's interest in the latter focuses on the hiring process, and features of the traditional male career path that are reflected in the present policy.

Human rights concerns are deservedly receiving a good deal of attention ranging from the recommendations of the President's Special Advisors on Ethnocultural Groups and Visible Minorities to those of the University Affairs Board's Special Committee on Student Societies and Human Rights. The Status of Women Office is closely following developments like these, for sensitivity and responsiveness to other forms of discrimination can and must complement our concern with gender issues. Women's work is not done.

On the lighter side, those fortunate enough to be in the tent on the front campus on U of T Day heard the new gender-neutral "Blue and White". Some claim they'll never forget it.

It's good to be back in print after a year's hiatus. The Ontario Work-Study Plan has once again been a key factor, and the Office welcomes Tracey Izatt, a third-year student in Women's Studies and Film Studies, to these pages. LR

U of T Day

With the adoption of the theme "Discover Our Diversity" the Status of Women Office saw U of T Day as an opportunity to illustrate an important, but often overlooked issue. Under the banner "Celebrating Our Diversity", Status of Women Officer Lois Reimer focussed attention on U of T's mandate to ensure services addressing the needs of *all* U of T students. It is a political and moral necessity that groups generally regarded as "marginal" not be undermined by an unrepresentative status quo that defines "normal" as white — male — middle-class.

The University of Toronto Committee on Homophobia is an example of a dynamic new group that participated. The group was formed in response to two counts of overt heterosexism in St. Michael's College newspaper, *The Mike*. Recently the paper decided to withdraw an editorial policy that allows for the refusal of letters containing heterosexist material. In another instance, *The Mike* refused to run an ad for the U of T "Homo Hop".

In an effort to counter such incidents of heterosexism the Committee on Homophobia actively promotes awareness around sexual orientation."The major challenge facing the Committee is to gain the support and encourage the involvement of lesbians and gays of colour," says Committee member Jackie Tripp. With the vitality already displayed by the group, there is no doubt they will approach this task with vigour.

A number of groups presenting on U of T Day demonstrated a new emphasis on broad spectrum safety and accessibility, centering on the need, for example, to develop and fund better services for people with disabilities to complete the integration of physically challenged people into the University system.

Liz Paterson of the International Student Centre said such displays are important both in terms of gaining visibility for necessary services, and forming links between the groups represented. "It's a really good opportunity to let the community see the many varied activities and services at U of T," stated Ombudsperson Liz Hoffman, underlining the need to promote awareness of the services available to both present and past students of U of T. TI

Women's Studies Forum

Friday November 16, more than 70 students and faculty of the Women's Studies Program met in an informal open forum discussion on issues of inclusion and exclusion in women's studies at U of T.

The ground-breaking meeting was organized in response to widespread concern over issues of race, gender, class and sexual orientation within the University.

Discussion focussed on a number of specific issues. In terms of course material, students and faculty discussed lack of sensitivity to racial issues, the privileging of white theory reflected in the choice of texts, and the allocation of course time spent on these texts.

The group addressed the issue of whether white instructors should be able to remove books about women of colour from the syllabus when they do not feel comfortable teaching the material, as well as issues surrounding the exclusion of material on First Nations peoples and women with disabilities, and the need for appropriate language to deal with racial issues.

The forum participants also dealt with a number of institutional-level topics of concern, such as the University's inability to address the problem of representation in its hiring policies, lack of access for both economically disadvantaged people and people of colour, and the need for more day care and affirmative action. Much discussion centred on the need to upgrade and strengthen the status of the Women's Studies Program so that it can assume an equal footing with other departments and function as a viable gateway to graduate studies.

These discussions culminated in the drafting of a proposed strategy designed to address issues of inclusion and exclusion. As a general strategy, the group called for more open dialogue and increased collaboration between faculty and students when lobbying the University administration.

Forum participants suggested that the inclusion of women of colour, so-called "Third World" women, women with disabilities and lesbians in course material should be mandated through a structural inclusion program. Class time could be allocated to allow students to express their frustration and voice concerns on issues of exclusion. Assigned research papers should require explicit reference to race, gender, class and heterosexism.

Participants agreed on the need for a formal mechanism to facilitate an ongoing dialogue and critique of courses, and a workshop on racism to deal with problems of language and curriculum.

The forum also suggested a number of amendments to the University's hiring policies to encourage fair representation. These include stepped-up affirmative action programs, and a letter-writing campaign and delegation visit to the President and other influential administrative office-holders to encourage the hiring of a woman of colour for an available Women's Studies/Social Sciences appointment. Forum participants proposed an exploration of all available channels to lobby for Departmental status for the Women's Studies Program and the formation of new guidelines for academic excellence. Students and faculty attending the forum also discussed a tuition freeze or abolition to deal effectively with the problem of university accessibility.

Participants felt that the solutions proposed by the group mark an important first step in addressing issues of inclusion and exclusion, not only within the Women's Studies Program, but in the University as a whole. TI

Submission Call

Submissions are invited for a special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Education* that will focus on feminist pedagogy. Papers are welcome from those working in foundational disciplines such as sociology or history or in interdisciplinary fields, including curriculum studies, women's studies, policy studies and administrative studies. Articles that situate feminist pedagogy in relation to critical pedagogy, progressive education, popular education and feminist theory are of particular interest. Submission deadline is June 15. For information: Linda Briskin/Rebecca Coulter, guest editors, special issue on feminist pedagogy, c/o *Canadian Journal of Education*, University of British Columbia, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, British Columbia V6T 1Z5.

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